

THE SCHOOL, THE STUDENT AND THE TARGET

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Abstract: *The article's purpose is to identify the different principles between the acting training in the American school system and the Romanian school system occurred because of the specific culture beliefs that both societies have on the mission of the actor and the theatrical arts in the world.*

Keywords: *drama school, educational system, acting training, admission requirements, acting methods and techniques*

What is the mission of a drama school⁵ and which are the principles that lie at the educational foundation of a drama school? Ideally, the mission of a drama school, or any vocational school for that matter, is to discover and develop talent. At the end of its educational process a drama school should form professionals capable of complying with the demands of the ever-evolving industry but most importantly, create artists capable of adding value to the industry. Theoretically, upon completing a BFA or an MFA program, the student - actor should have developed the skills to work in any medium, form or technology, adapt to the industry, but most of all, innovate and create within the industry.

But do all these operating concepts that the acting schools are using in an effort to achieve their goals, define and describe the

⁵ An undergraduate or graduate department in a university or a college that teaches acting. It can also be an independent institution specialized in performing arts that offers training in acting and subjects related to acting in which case upon completion the acting students receive a Bachelor or Master of fine arts. In this article I am referring solely to the free standing institutions specialized in theatre arts.

same reality, anywhere in the world? Does talent means the same thing in Nepal as it means in France?

Although we don't have a unanimous definition of what talent is – since it's a subjective and not an objective experience - we all seem to agree that (acting) talent is universal. But even so, is (acting) talent perceived and evaluated universally the same?

What about training? Do the students (in acting) form in an identical training paradigm in US as in Europe? The industry and the specialists draw a distinct line between the American type of cinema and the European type of cinema, between Broadway type of shows and Royal Shakespeare type of shows, between Stanislavski's type of school and Lee Strasberg's type of school and other methods and acting techniques that evolved on both continents. However when it comes to the actual actors, the distinction between the European and the American type of actor, the line gets blurred.

From comparing my Romanian professional experiences to the American ones, I am inclined to say that although the Romanian acting schools operate with the same concepts as the American ones, the representation of what these concepts mean is slightly different. Talent may be universal, but the characteristics and manifestations of talent are perceived and valued according to the specifics of the culture and society to which the artists belong. The multitude facets of (acting) talent weight differently in different places as they weighted differently in different times. What was considered good acting in the western world of the late eighteen hundred has very little in common to what is considered good acting these days. The "femme fatale"⁶ - type in the 60's hardly resembles the millennium "femme fatale", if there's a "femme fatale" type now-a-days at all! And the list can continue in regards to other film archetypes (such as the villain or the hero).

⁶ A women that is using seductive powers to achieve her goals, but most of all a mysterious and intriguing women. In regards to these last two aspect I am refering to, when I use the term, since I believe the seductress formula changed over time.

Also the nature and the demands of the theatre and film industry in Europe, Romania included, differ greatly from the nature and the demands of the theatre and film industry in North America. And this is mainly because they have a different financing system. And the financing system is different because the mission of the art in society is viewed differently.

In Europe, the primary function of the art is to inform, educate and shape the society; a function for which the state is traditionally considered responsible. Thus art is sustained by governmental funds. In the public sector the state acts as an entrepreneur managing a part of the invested capital in culture.

In USA though, art is regarded as a part of the market economy and the art product as a commodity, especially after the pop culture emerged. Therefore art's main purpose is to generate financial profit. A purpose for which the business activities are traditionally considered responsible. But the business activities are run by private owners. Thus art is supported by private funds. In order to generate profit, reality proved, art has to be entertaining. Therefore in the private sector the entrepreneurs are managing a part of the invested capital mainly in entertainment and not in culture.

Under these circumstances the principal parties responsible for forming the art creators - meaning the vocational schools - shape themselves on the cultures beliefs of what art's function is and how it should be founded. In consequence, although both types of schools teach the same acting principals, their goals are not the same.

Not only are the goals not the same, but the educational process as well. The principles that lie at the foundation of the educational system are influenced by the distinct viewpoints that the two types of societies have on education in general and consequently on the actor's training specifically. Both continents agree that education's major goal is to prepare the students to be harmonies, responsible, engaged, self-aware citizens and experts in the

performance of a socially useful task. But when it comes to how to achieve these goals the disagreements start to occur.

In Europe the primary purpose of education is enlightenment and personal evolution and only secondary is preparation for a job. Therefore, the more extensive the education is, the more likely is to develop critical and creative thinking skills and deep content knowledge which are essential in developing good citizens. In Europe's vision a society grows if its individuals grow. So it is the state responsibility to enlighten its subjects through education, in order to develop in them important civic cultural values.

As a result, in Europe, education, just like art, is supported by governmental funds. All the public schools and universities are free for the E.U students and some are free even for the international students⁷. Some of the private schools and universities are also tuition - free or charge a very low tuition fee, for international students included.⁸

In America the paradigm is quite the opposite. The more specialized the education is, the more likely is to develop analytic and problem - solving skills which are essential in developing good quality professionals and specialists. The professionals and specialists are the main contributors to the increase of the economy. Therefore they play an essential role in community because in the American vision a society grows if its economy grows. Thus, since the American economy is mostly private, it is the private-owners responsibility to invest in the education of specialized professionals. In consequence, in US - with the exception of the community colleges or some of the religious colleges - higher education is not free. Not only that is not free, but the tuition can be very expensive both in public and private schools, even if the public schools are

⁷ <https://www.study.eu/article/study-in-europe-for-free-or-low-tuition-fees>

⁸ <https://europe.graduateshotline.com/free-education.html>

(partially) funded by the federal government (local or state) through state taxes⁹.

When it comes to studying acting in USA there are only five public universities in the whole country that offer free MFA programs, and to my knowledge, no BFA ones¹⁰. None of these five are considered prestigious universities. Unlike in Europe, the American public school system, especially the free one, with very few exceptions, offers poor quality education and has low level standards. Since the federal funding is rather scarce, the majority of the free public schools can't afford to hire the most competent stuff or buy the best quality supplies, facilities and equipment.

In Europe, the public universities – which most of them are, acting colleges included – in general, hold a much higher esteem than their private counterparts. Even when the funding is limited, the reputation compensates. Most of these schools date from the second half of the XIX century and were created by royal decrees or by acts of parliament at the initiative of royalties, nobility, statesmen, world famous scientists etc. Of course, there are exceptions to the rules, particularly in the European hot spots for the acting industry – such as UK and France - which have a number of private acting conservatoires that are top ranked. But otherwise, in general, the most selective and demanding learning institutions in Europe, noted for high competitiveness and nationwide prestige, are public and tuition free.

In America, on the contrary, the private universities are the elite ones, with very few exceptions. Although some of the funding is done through endowments and donations, a substantial part of the money comes from the students. The student is basically “a client”, a client who “contracts” the services of a learning institution in order to be educated. This is a very important aspect that shifts

⁹ https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_330.30.asp?current=yes

¹⁰ https://study.com/articles/free_mfa_acting_programs.html

significantly the educational paradigm from the European one and creates a different dynamic in the student – professor relationship then in Europe. And so, since higher education is essentially a business, like in any business environment, there is considerable competition among colleges and universities. The higher the success rate of their students, the more credentials these universities will have. The more credentials will have, the better funding will get.

So, all the BFA and MFA programs are under a lot of pressure to deliver top actors, knowing that only the best of the best have a chance to make it in such a tough industry. Therefore, all the drama schools try to offer calibre training, professors, opportunities and facilities, because they know that only the highest level of education will draw upon the highest quality candidates to become the best and most successful actors. They also know that in order to remain on top of their game, they constantly need to improve their programs, update their technology and facilities, upgrade the faculty and staff skills and competencies, diversify their study – research – network opportunities and last but not least focus their efforts to select the candidates who have the potential to be the best students

Producing high quality professionals, ultimately the goal of any (elite) learning institution, public or private can only be accomplished through very high educational standards. For the private learning institutions – for which the major source of funding comes from the students - this goal is not only desirable but necessary. For the public ones, funded by the state, although the goal is not as necessary - since their (financial) survival is not directly related to their performance indicators - it is still just as important. It's a matter of prestige and notoriety to produce students capable of achieving the higher rate of success in the industry. The public, state funded acting colleges know that only by forming thriving and accomplished actors, they can succeed to stay relevant on the market and maintain a leading position in this educational field.

In the followings I will try to explore how some of these high standards unfold in various aspects of the educational process in a Romanian acting conservatory in comparison with an American one. Concretely, I will analyse the methodology of the admission requirements and audition process in the Romanian (public) acting schools and in the North American (private) acting schools, applied concretely to UNATC and USC. Since I completed my BFA respectively my MFA studies in both of these schools, I believe I have relevant insights into their educational paradigms. Also since both faculties are regarded as top learning institutions in their country of origins, I consider they are representative examples of the European and the American perspective on the acting training.

I am, of course, aware that every acting school (private or public, free or not), regardless of where it is located on the map, has its own vision, mission and goals.

But no matter what acting methods and techniques they utilize, no matter what pedagogical methods and methodologies they use, each and every acting school, *is a by-product of the culture and civilization to which it belongs* in the end. Each and every acting school in this world succumbs to the culture beliefs and social mentalities of its respective society for the simple reason that it is a part of that society. *Mentalities shape realities and vice-versa*. Therefore there is a red thread that connects all the American acting conservatories as there is a red thread that connects all the European acting conservatoires. Even if the European acting schools developed in distinct cultures, they developed into a cultural space that shares similar characteristics based on a common history and past. The European civilization, at least in its postmodern form - European Union, has the same core values. Although different, the EU societies have more things in common in between themselves than each of them has with the American society.

According to NAST (National Association of Schools of Theatre) in US there are over 100 Acting certified Colleges and

Conservatoires public and private¹¹. Out of these, only few public ones (like UCLA, SUNY, Rutgers, UC Irvine, Washington University, UCSD, North Carolina State University, Michigan University, Connecticut University, Minnesota State University and Florida State University) are recognized to have strong acting programs¹². In Romania, there are ten certified acting schools – nine public and one private. (After the '89 Revolution there used to be three, but two of them – “Spiru Haret” University and the Ecological University closed their Theatre and Film departments.). Out of these ten schools only UNATC is a university and has an independent status. The other nine are faculties that function within larger universities. In Romania, UNATC is considered the leading acting school in the country, followed by The Film and Theatre Faculty of “Babeş Bolyai” University, Cluj and the Theatre Faculty of “George Enescu” Art University, Iaşi.

There is no official ranking system for these schools, but the considerations are made upon the professional success rate of the students and the number of applicants per school. UNATC produced the majority of the most important actors of Romania, some of them quite remarkable, and has the largest number of applicants per year for their BFA and MFA programs. Also Cluj and Iaşi universities gave to the Romanian theatre and film landscape very accomplished actors, the most recent ones being: Ofelia Popii, Pavel Bartos, Ioan Gury Pascu, Marius Bodochi (Cluj) and Ana Maria Marinca, Marius Manole, Olimpia Melinte, Valentina Popa, and Florentina Țilea (Iaşi).

¹¹ <http://www.schoolsintheusa.com/TheatreAccreditation.cfm>

¹² <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/amazing-acting-colleges-know-5772/>

I. The admission requirements for the BFA programs in Romania & U.S.A.

Note 1: I will ignore comparing the bureaucracy (administration and legalities) since these aspects have no relevance for the actual educational paradigms of these two types of schools.

Note 2: I will compare the admission requirements as they are stated on the acting school's websites. I will not refer extensively to any of the other acting schools except UNATC and USC but I will summaries all the admission and audition procedures that the Romanian and the American schools have in common. Although I wasn't able to study each and every American school admission requirements as I did with the Romanian ones (since in America there are approximately ten times more schools of drama then in Romania), I can state in all confidence that the admission requirements and the audition procedures are pretty standard.

Besides the extensive research I have done on the acting schools' admission requirements and programs when I applied for my MFA and besides the personal audition experiences I had when applying to a few of the top American acting schools (such as Yale, TISCH, Colombia, Harvard, Stella Adler, UCLA, ACT, The Old Globe USD, The New School of Drama New York, Rutgers, Washington University, UC Irvine,- all ranked in the top 25 Acting Schools in the country) the first argument in support of my affirmation are the URTHA's auditions.

"The URTHA's - The University Resident Theatre Association - are an annual recruiting event held each year in multiple cities, bringing together prospective MFA candidates and faculty recruiters from dozens of top theatre programs"¹³. Fifty universities and schools participate to the recruiting process as members, while dozens of other satellite schools partake. The

¹³ <https://urta.com>

candidates give the initial audition in front of a large commission composed of faculty representatives of all these different acting schools. After this preliminary audition, the call - backs are held individually by each school. But having a first one time audition held in the same time and place for all the participant schools is an indicator that the admission requirements and the audition process are the same for all schools.

Henceforth I will identify the type of admission requirements and audition procedures that the Romanian and the American schools have in common, as well as where they are disparate. I will also break down the phases of the examination process and compare them for the purpose of highlighting the strongest points of each parties involved.

II. The duration & admission rate of the BFA programs

One of the first differentiating aspects is the length of the programs and the number of vacancies in a program. Ideally, only the candidates with a great potential and a true calling for this profession should be taken in consideration since this is a vocational profession, very demanding and highly competitive.

According to NAST, most of the BFA programs in America last 4 years and offer between 18 to 22 spots maximum, divided among two acting groups¹⁴.

The BFA programs in Romania last 3 years, and the number of spots available varies greatly. As stated on each of the school's web sides, in 2019 the availability is as following: The Art Faculty of the University of Lower Danube, Galati offered 24 spots (1 tuition free)¹⁵, The Faculty of Music and Theater of UVT, Timișoara offered 14 spots (12 tuition free) for the Romanian Section and 17 spots (6

¹⁴ <https://nast.arts-accredit.org>

¹⁵ <https://www.optiuni.ro/specializations/4255>

tuition free) for Hungarian Section¹⁶. The Faculty of Film and Television of the “Babeş Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca offered 15 spots (tuition free) for the Romanian Section and 15 for the Hungarian Section (11 tuition free)¹⁷, The Theatre Faculty of “George Enescu” University of the Art, Iaşi offered 15 spots (tuition free)¹⁸, The Faculty of Letters and Art of the “Lucian Blaga” University, Sibiu offered 12 spots (5 tuition free), The Art Faculty of “Ovidius” University, Constanţa offered 10 spots (tuition free) for the Acting Department¹⁹, The Faculty of Theology, Letters, History and Art of the Piteşti University offers 10 spots (5 tuition free)²⁰, The Art Faculty of Târgu Mureş, offered 12 spots (7 tuition free) for the Romanian section and just as many for the Hungarian section²¹, The Letters Faculty of The Craiova University offered 8 spots (none tuition free)²².

Before adhering to the Bologna System, UNATC’s BFA program (along with all the other BFA programs in the country) lasted 4 years as well, and offered a total of 20 to 22 spots divided between 2 acting groups. (During the communist regime there were only 8 spots all together). Nowadays the spots can go up to a total of 60, divided between three acting groups. In 2019 there were exactly 60 spots available (14 with tuition fee)²³.

Although UNATC is still considered the number one acting school in the country, its admission rate is higher than of the any other acting school in Romania. Even The Art Faculty of Hyperion University, Bucharest – currently the only private certified acting

¹⁶ <https://admitere.uvt.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Înscrieri-FMT-Licenta-2019.pdf>

¹⁷ https://admitere.ubbcluj.ro/ro/licenta/teatru_film#locuri

¹⁸ https://www.arteiasi.ro/?page_id=2071

¹⁹ <https://www.optiuni.ro/specializations/415>

²⁰ <https://www.optiuni.ro/specializations/8044>

²¹ <https://www.optiuni.ro/specializations/5296>

²² <https://litere.ucv.ro/litere/ro/content/admitere-licență-2019>

²³ <https://unatc.ro/eng/aplication/index.php>

school in Romania, which basically lives out of student tuition – offers half the number of spots that UNATC is currently offering (30)²⁴.

Because the admittance is not as exclusive as it was back in the days, naturally, the entry criteria are not as high and as a consequence the quality of the students is altered. With such a large number of students and such a big variation in the quality of students it is highly unlikely to achieve great performance. One of the first objectives of the teachers is to reduce the ability discrepancies between the students belonging to the same acting group. However the teachers simply don't have enough time to focus on each and every student specific needs and adapt their pedagogical methods accordingly, because of how numerous the students are. Usually, the most talented students are not challenged enough in order to reach their maximum level of potentiality, while the less talented ones are too challenged. Thus without having a consistent group of students to work with, it is very hard for the teachers to raise the bar, in the absence of which, virtuosity can very rarely blossom. As a result the curriculum had to be simplified and adjusted accordingly. Even more so, since the length of the program is shorter and the individual time allocated to each student is less.

Unfortunately, in an effort to keep its university status and preserve its independence, UNATC has to fulfil a certain number of students. A smaller amount of students would not only mean less money from the government, but would also imply a downgrading in status, from university to faculty.

²⁴https://www.hyperion.ro/index.php?option=com_attachments&task=download&id=247

III. The admission procedures

The BFA's admission procedure has the same blue print in US as it has in Romania. The candidate is evaluated through theoretical and practical probes which are individual as well as collective. However there are subtle differences between the vision that the Romanian school and the American school has on this topic.

1. The theoretical probe

At UNATC and University of Galati the theoretical probe is composed of a multiple choice test and an essay. The multiple-choice test evaluates the candidate's general notions of theatre and film. For the admission the candidate has to study a small bibliography and filmography consisting of (5) plays and (5) films that the respective school consider representative for the national and the universal history of theatre and film.

Not all the acting schools in Romania (public or private, for that matter) have this admission requirement. The "George Enescu" National University of Arts, from Iasi as well as "Babeş Bolyai" University from Cluj, Ovidius University, Constanţa, Craiova University, and Piteşti University test as well the candidate's theoretical notions of theatre and film, but the probe consists of an interview. The other four institutions don't have this admission requirement at all.

The subject of the essay - an admission requirement that only UNATC and Galati University have - is a play analysis with the focus on the relationship dynamic between the characters in the given play.

At USC and, to my knowledge, all the other American schools of drama - the theoretical probe consists of an essay in which the candidate is required to conceive a personal statement or a statement of purpose. The statement should include one's introduction, argumentation for the school selection, the training

objectives and career goals. Some of these schools offer as an alternative a Q&A written test with the same objectives as the ones of the essay. Some other schools use both procedures as part of their admission requirements.

The purpose of these writings is to give the evaluating commission an opportunity to form an opinion about the candidate's personality and most importantly to learn about his/her expectations in regards to his/her acting education, in an effort to assess if the candidate's vision is aligned to the school's vision.

Since, as I mentioned before, the student is basically "contracting" the school's services, the commission's primarily objective is to determine as early as possible in the (admission) process if it can fulfil the candidate's expectancies. And vice-versa. If the candidate represents the type of student the school is looking for.

The theoretical probe is eliminatory in both school systems, with the difference that in U.S. a candidate can be disqualified from sustaining the admission solely if he/she fails to write the essay, but not based on the content of the essay. The content is not subject to grading. The writings are only used as a guiding tool, to estimate if there's a good match between the candidate and the school.

This is a second instance that reflects the different philosophies in regards to the acting training in Europe, Romania specifically, and America.

The European schools of drama value the general (artistic) culture that a (prospective) student has. Studying universal theatre history is fundamental in the European acting training. There is an actual course that the students have to take during their BFA program (at UNATC and not only), on this subject. From a European perspective the prospective student should have at least basic knowledge of dramatic literature, since it represents, after all, the bread and butter of his/her future profession.

From an American perspective, this aspect, doesn't count so greatly. What counts are the candidate's personality, unique individuality, desires, and aspirations. These are further more practical traits than his/her artistic cultivation. The level of education can be changed at any point in life. Character not so much. (Although in Europe it is believed that culture plays a key factor in character building).

Even in the long run in most of the American drama schools the history of theatre is not an object of study. Textual studies classes are considered more beneficial. Learning how to analyse a dramatic text and discover how to transpose a character from the fictional pages into a concrete playable reality is considered a more useful and specific skill for an actor than knowing about the medieval mystery play, for example.

In my opinion, a written test that evaluates the general artistic culture of a candidate is mandatory. Only by having a good understanding of the origins and evolution of theatre and the different genres of the dramatic literature an actor can attempt to add value to the theatre of today. We are all living in the now (the American culture in particular supports this life style) but the now has no meaning if not put in perspective. If not placed in a historical context, the danger is to take "the now" for granted and feel entitled to it. How can a future actor understand, for example, the notion of social status that a period play implies if he/she/they never read Moliere?

I do believe though that a textual analysis course should be introduced in the BFA and MFA programs (considering that most of the Romanian and American MFA's programs accept, at least theoretically, applicants with no former background in acting). Currently in Romania the textual analysis classes are integrated in the actual acting classes, but judging from my personal experience a course designed *especially* for this subject is most advantageous. First of all it optimizes the work flow in the acting classes, because it covers the theoretical part of a scene study. Secondly it deepens the

student's research for the role, since the role is explored from various perspectives. Thirdly it teaches the student the creative thinking process of a role, by breaking down all the phases of the process.

But for examination purposes, the interview, a phase contained in the audition process by the schools on both continents, can replenishes successfully the objectives that the American acting conservatories follow through the personal statement/statement of purpose requirement. Because, at any rate, the aim of the interview is pretty much the same as of the personal statement.

Although it must be mentioned that the American commission has an additional objective during the interview session: to establish the candidate's financial situation. This aspect is very much taken into consideration. A lot of the schools offer grants and scholarships in addition to financial aid. At Yale for example, 90% of the tuition is covered by the school upon the entry position. Every school has a distinct scholarship policy, but some of these schools have very limited endowments, so the applicants' financial possibilities can be decisive criteria of admission. A school cannot accept a student that can't actually pay for his tuition in in the detriment of others who are capable of doing so.

This is a third relevant aspect that creates a separation between the criteria of admission in a Romanian school and an American one. Even if some of the spots in the Romanian BFA programs involve some type of school taxes, the amount is pretty affordable for the candidates with average family incomes.

But it can be argued, indeed, that these two procedures combined (an essay *and* an interview) give the commission a better insight on the candidate and also streamlines the admission process, since a preliminary guidance selection of the candidates can occur from an early stage.

2. The practical probe

2.1. The individual audition

a) The Repertoire

In the Romanian schools, the audition repertoire consists of monologues, poems and stories. The number of stories and monologues is usually the same (one monologue - comedic or dramatic - and two stories, fairy tales included). The number of poems is different (some universities ask for 6 poems, others for 10, some demand that at least 3 of them to be fables etc., but the genre diversity is pretty much the same).

In US the candidate is required to prepare *only* monologues. Respectively two contrasting monologues: one dramatic and one comedic, one from a classical piece (preferably in verse, preferably/mandatory Shakespeare) and the other from a contemporary piece. The candidate is also advised to have two other monologues prepared, in case the commission needs to see additional work. Julliard, for example, requires for the international students to present one of the four monologues in the native tongue. One more time the American approach is practical: why ask the candidate to prepare materials that don't belong to a dramatic genre, since an actor's working material is mainly plays and scripts?

In my opinion, the candidate's ability to explore lyricism and perform a text with rhythm and rime is better serve through a monologue in verse – since a monologue is a literal procedure that is more likely used in a dramatic writing then a poem. A monologue also implies creating a character, unlike poetry.

Furthermore, the mandatory preparation of two contrasting monologues tests both the comedic and the dramatic abilities of the candidate, abilities that are better expressed then through a poem or a story. A poem or a story cannot create a theatrical situation as

powerful as a monologue can. It can be argued that having more audition material to prepare challenges the candidate's memorization skill – which is an essential instrument for an actor - but in the same time having less but more complex material demands more of the candidate. It can also be argued that having more diverse material to prepare challenges the candidate to explore the specific performative expressions that the various literary genres demand.

Specifically, in the case of stories, the technique of narrating in first person, tests the candidate's visualization and imaginative abilities. Abilities that are needed any time a character plays the story teller part in a play. But once again, a monologue might do just as well.

b) The Repertoire's length

In US each monologue should not exceed two minutes in length, sometimes a minute and a half. In Romania, there is no precise time limit for any of the materials included in the candidate's repertoire. The candidate's performance lasts as long as the commission members consider it necessary. In America the committee doesn't stop the candidate unless the presented material is longer than the imposed time limit. Thus everybody has an equal amount of time to present the prepared material. The length limitation measure is imposed due to the great number of applicants but it also has a more important objective: to tests the applicant's sense of discipline and rigor, both key factors in an actor's training. Any creative act can only exist in a certain framework. Invariably the actor's framework is shaped by the director's vision, whose indication the actor has to follow. The candidate's ability to find a dramatic text under two minutes (with a narrative arc for the character, not an easy task) it's a first step into demonstrating his capacity to follow instructions. Failing to do so is downgraded by the commissions in America.

c) The Audition Phases

In Romanian drama schools, the individual audition has two phases. In the first phase, that is eliminatory, the candidate presents poems and stories and only in the second stage the candidate presents a monologue of his/her choice (in some cases from a list of mandatory materials given by the school) and any other materials from his/her repertoire upon commission's request.

In U.S. the number of phases depends on the school. A lot of schools ask for a preliminary taped audio (with the two monologues). The reasons being: on one hand to facilitate the audition process for the non-local and international students and on the other hand to simplify the audition process. This eliminatory procedure is an absolutely necessity for the elite schools which receive thousands and thousands of applications each year.

In case the candidate qualifies for the live audition he/she will perform the same repertoire again, plus the additional monologues upon commission's request. Some schools such as Julliard or TISCH have up to 3 call-backs, due to the great number of applicants and the very exclusive acceptance into the program. Each call - back is eliminatory.

Besides the repertoire material, the schools on both continents ask the candidate to prepare an acapella song (in US only 6 to 8 bars of songs are needed, in the spirit of efficiency). By singing acapella the rhythmical and vocal abilities are being tested. In Romanian schools the candidate's coordination and rhythmicity abilities are additionally evaluated through a movement piece. The members of the commission play a recorded song of their choice and ask the candidate to move freely/ dance on the song.

Another stage of the individual audition is the cold read. Not all American and Romanian schools practice this audition procedure. In Romania, only UNATC, "Hyperion" University Bucharest, Galați University, Pitești University, Craiova University and "Ovidiu"

University, Constanța will ask the candidate to do a cold read from a material provided by the commission. Some Romanian schools also ask the candidate to do an improvisation exercise on a theme established by the commission with or without a physical object (“George Enescu” National University of Art, Iași, the Târgu – Mureș Art University, “Hyperion” University, Bucharest). UNATC, “Babeș Bolyai” University and Pitești University test the candidate’s improvisational skills during the work-shops, while all the other ones disregard this audition procedure.

In US all the exercises that can test the above set of skills (rhythm, coordination, improvisation capacities etc.) will be done solely in group exercises during the work-shops, due to time constraints. Yet not only the time constraints influence this pragmatically approach, but also the believe that these sets of skills are better expressed through group exercises then individual ones, which imply a more dynamic context.

I personally subscribe to the second approach, which I consider a more efficient evaluation tool because it tests both the candidate’s ability to work individually as well as in a team, which after all is the basic work formula of this profession.

2.2. The work-shop & interview

The work - shops may last several days, depending on the number of candidates, but usually not more than 3 days. In America the work - shops represent the pre - final stage of the audition process, followed only by the interview. Some schools do a combination of individual and group auditions during the course of these 2/3 days. In Romania the work-shops represent an intermediate stage in the audition process along with the interview. The last phase of the individual audition (where the candidate presents the prepared monologue) represents the culminating point. Upon the grade obtain

in this final audition the candidate acceptance into the program is established.

I believe that it makes more sense having the interview in the end. The candidate may be more at ease to express him/herself once the pressure to deliver it's gone. Also placing the interview at the end of the audition process gives the commission enough time to observe the potential problems that the candidate might have and double check them during the interview. At UNATC, all the professors that will teach the future first year students participate at the interview session. At USC, is the core faculty that participates regardless of the year of study to which they teach. The core faculty is composed of: the head of acting department, the acting teacher, the voice teacher and the movement teacher.

The work-shops are designed to test through different games and exercises the candidates individual skills (awareness, sensorial perceptions, focus, coordination, sense of rhythm, memory, imagination, creativity, playfulness and improvisational skills) and group skills (his level of collaboration, cooperation, participation and his ability to be a team player). But there's more to the work - shops then the actual testing of skills. The work-shops represent the best way to know the candidate's personality and character, under the given circumstances. First of all, because during the workshops the candidate doesn't feel put on the spot as much as during the individual audition and the interview, so there's a chance his/her demeanour might not be as contrived. Secondly, because the time frame attributed to the work-shops is the longest time allocated to any of the audition procedures, giving the commission the opportunity to observe the candidates thoroughly and the candidate the opportunity to open up and emerge. Thirdly, because the commission can observe the group dynamic and the dynamic of each and every candidate within the group.

In Romania the work-shops are not graded, they are used only as guidance tools.

However in US the work - shops are a very relevant element of the audition process, maybe the most relevant. This is the reason why, at USC the core faculty, sometimes the entire faculty, partakes at the work-shops. At UNATC the work-shops are run by a single teacher and take place simultaneously. The selected candidates are divided into as many groups as necessary so there are no more than 18 to 20 participants in each group. The participants work improvisational and movement exercises and acting games.

At USC each of the core teachers runs a section of the work-shops while others observe the candidates. Each teacher leads exercises in his/her specialization area. In consequence the work-shop is a combination of movement, voice, improvisation and acting exercises, the purpose being to explore the candidate's abilities in as many areas as possible. Yet it is not so much the candidates' skills that are being observed as it is his personality and character. The candidate personality and character is just as important as his talent. The elite American acting schools, to my knowledge, are not just scouting for talent; they are scouting for the *relevant type of talent*, both for the school and the industry as well as for the American society in general.

Also, all the American BFA's (and MFA's programs) function as Repertory Theatre. During the course of the 4, respectively 3 years of study the students will perform together in several plays, so the ability to function as an ensemble is essential. One's capacity to be flexible, adapt, adjust and integrate are highly regarded. Therefore USC commission pay extra attention to the candidate's behaviour during the work-shops. Understanding theatre as a collaborative art form with social impact, is one of main learning objectives of the American acting programs and USC is very adamant about it. During the first BFA year (and the first MFA year) the students are part of the tech team of the third year BFA's/MFA's show. The goal is not just to learn the behind the scene process (light, sound and set design, props, costumes, hair and make-up,

stage managing etc.) but also to learn that acting is a profession that can only be done collectively.

This is the reason why from the pool of talent, only the talents that reveal the potential to create the best possible ensemble work in alignment with the schools vision about the acting craft will be accepted.

I. The admission requirements for the MFA programs in Romania & America

The MFA's admission procedures don't have quite the same blue print in US as they have in Romania. Some Romanian schools evaluate the candidate through theoretical and practical probes indeed, while others only through practical probe. But in American the probes are theoretical and practical, individual as well as collective, while in Romania the probes are only individual.

II. Duration & admission rate

The first distinctions between the Romanian MFA's and the American ones, just like in the case of the BFA's, refer to the length of the program and the number of applicants accepted into the program. According to NAST the MFA's in America last for 3 years, very rarely for 2 (Harvard's case). In Romania the period of study is two years and not all of the faculties offer a master program as well. (The Universities of Iasi, Galati and Pitesti don't have an MFA Program and Constanta University only offers a MM (Musical Theatre Master) - 20 spots (14 tuition free)²⁵. UNATC offered this year 24²⁶ spots in their MFA Program, having once again the highest

²⁵ <http://arte.univ-ovidius.ro/admitere/oferta-educationala>

²⁶ <http://www.unatc.ro/eng/aplication/index.php>

acceptance rate. Only Hyperion University ²⁷ and Timisoara University²⁸ offered a bigger number of spots (30). Cluj University offered 18 spots (9 free tuition)²⁹. University of Craiova offered only 10 spots (tuition free)³⁰, Sibiu University offered 6 spots (1 tuition free)³¹ Târgu Mureș University offered only 3 spots (tuition free) for the Romanian section and 3 more for the Hungarian section.

In US the MFA programs accept at the most 12 participants.

III. The Admission Requirements

For the American acting schools the admission requirements into an MFA program follow pretty much the same blue print of the BFA admission. However the program is much more intense and the work load more demanding. At USC all students perform in at least two plays per semester on top of the class culminations.

In US anybody can apply to an MFA program, and many had. The candidates come from all venues of life, from all corners of the world, at different stages of life, with a dream: the American dream of success in the country of all possibilities. Therefore many of the MFA students in the American schools have no professional acting background. Various USC MFA promotions included students in their late forties or early fifties. Some of them nowadays have flourishing careers.

In Romania, not all acting schools accept candidates without a previous background (diploma) into acting. This is definitely the

²⁷https://www.hyperion.ro/index.php?option=com_attachments&task=download&id=249

²⁸ <https://www.optiuni.ro/specializations/7764>

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³⁰ <https://litere.ucv.ro/litere/ro/content/admitere-master-2019>

³¹ <https://admitere.ulbsibiu.ro/ro/facultati/facultatea-de-litere-si-arte/masterat-2019/#metodologie>

case for the “Babeş Bolyai” University in Cluj³² and “Hyperion” University in Bucharest³³.

For an MFA application, the history of the candidate’s education can be relevant to some extent. Just like in the case of the BFA’s applications a study diploma and transcripts are needed. In Romania, though, at some schools, a part of the final grade received by the applicant to an MFA program is based on the results that the candidate obtain in college, regardless of the field of study.

In US there is a minimum GPA score demand, in order to be eligible to apply for an MFA, (just like there is a minimum SAT score demand to apply for a BFA), but the score (in both cases) does not affected in any way the admission. The candidate’s college grades do not influence in any way the final grade of the admission. Most acting schools however do not take into consideration the candidate’s GRE result. Even the low score doesn’t affect the candidate’s acceptance into the program. Yale policy for example, clearly states that the GRE score is not an admission factor.

In this regard, the American and the European outlook on the actors training are, one more time, divergent. In Romania, the aspiring actor’s level of education makes a difference, since at some schools up to 30% of the entering criteria is based on his/her college transcripts, while in US this is not a key factor at all. Once again, the American pragmatism has its say: why evaluate the candidate in areas that are not directly related to his acting talent?

I believe that the approach that some Romanian schools have is justified in the case of those school that only accept BFA graduates to their MFA programs. In those particular cases, the educational background of the candidate is definitely relevant.

³² <https://teatrufilm.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/REGULAMENTCALENDAR-ADMITERE-MASTER-CU-DENUMIRI-NOI-2019.pdf>

³³ https://www.hyperion.ro/index.php?option=com_attachments&task=download&id=249

IV. The individual probe

1. The interview

Most of the Romanian schools demand an artistic portfolio from the candidate. Some schools which practice the interview auditioning procedure choose a topic related to the candidate's previous artistic work. The interview may also test the candidate's general notions of theatre (usually based on an assigned bibliography).

In the American schools the interview for the MFA auditions serves the same purpose as for the BFA ones: to get to know the candidate, his/her passion for acting and his/her commitment to the profession.

2. The repertoire

The MFA audition repertoire for entering the Romanian graduate programs is intended more as a show piece than an individual performance. There is a theatricality element involved into the MFA' auditions, regardless of how the schools formulate their requirements. All schools ask the candidate either to present a fragment from a show in which they previously performed, or to present a show - like moment in which they demonstrate their acting, vocal and dance skills.

For example, the Târgu Mureș University asks the candidate to present a 15-20 minute performance and sustain an interview. Timișoara University asks for a monodrama and also requires an interview. Craiova University asks for the candidate to present a repertoire composed of his previous body of work and also to sustain an interview. Constanța University asks the candidate to present a 15 minute moment in which he/she should perform a monologue, sing and dance and also sustain an interview. "Hyperion" University asks

the candidate to present a 6 minute performance with a coherent theme in which the candidate sings and dance as well. UNATC and Cluj University are the only schools that have audition processes similar to their BFA ones. Although the audition focuses only on the individual performance (there are no work-shops) the MFA candidate, is supposed to prepare a repertoire. The repertoire includes only monologues. UNATC asks for 3 contrasting monologues, comedic and dramatic, from contemporary and classical plays. All the monologues should not last longer than 3 minutes. The classic plays must be selected from an assigned bibliography. Instead of one of the 3 monologues a scene may be presented. Also the candidate needs to present a 3 minute singing and dancing moment. Cluj University doesn't specify how many monologues or scenes need to be presented, but asks the candidate to do in addition an improvisation moment. But even UNATC, by asking the candidate to present a 3 minutes singing and dancing moment together with the option to present a scene instead of one of the monologues, brings an element of theatricality in the audition process. Therefore, the repertoire demands represent another distinction between the Romanian and the American MFA's admission philosophies. Because, in reality, all the MFA Romanian programs are open mostly for the BFA graduates, even if some of them in theory state that are open for general admission. In practice, it is hardly unlikely for a candidate with no previous acting studies to pass the audition. Not impossible, but hardly unlikely.

Taking in consideration that the BFA graduates are trained only for 3 years, I think the idea of a program that is designed to continue their acting studies and to intensify their work on the craft is very beneficial. But what I don't consider as beneficial is the admission requirements and the criteria upon which the candidate's audition is being judge, at least in theory.

From my standpoint, the current audition requirements of most of the Romanian MFA programs area a proper evaluating

method for candidates with previous acting experience. It is only natural that the work load that the audition preparation implies to be more complex for the applicants who have a certain acting training already. But I would argue that the previous acting experience should not be an admission factor, at least for the schools that state otherwise. These schools either make the audition requirements truly accessible to all type of candidates, or make the audition requirements truly exclusive to BFA candidates. Either, or a real choice should be made.

I also believe that there is no need to put such an emphasis on the candidate's singing and dancing abilities. All Romanian schools ask for a show-type of moment of singing and dancing. Since none of these MFA's except the MM in the University of Constanta, do not offer specific training in musical theatre.

Unless a Musical Theatre department will be created in any of these schools, which in my opinion can represent a significant added value to the current MFA curriculums, the candidate's vocal, rhythmical and coordination skills should not be considered as mandatory as they seem to be considered now, judging the admission requirements. Or, following this reasoning, then a musical theatre play should be included in the MFA curriculum by all means.

The purpose of a Master in Fine Arts is for one to *master* the craft. But the craft may be expressed in different shapes and forms. Some students are more inclined to physical theatre, some others to musical theatre, while some are at their best performing expressionist theatre etc. Drawing upon my professional experiences, the best results are achieved when the commission succeeds to further develop a MFA class in a particular direction.

I think that by introducing a workshop probe, the commission can observe which candidates have in common the same type of potentialities and select only the candidates that can reciprocally enhance these potentialities, candidates who represent a vast array of perspectives and passions and who can enrich each

other's education by challenging each other, inside the classroom and out. Since working on shows represents the major work load of the MFA program, (at least in Romania), in my view, the admission criteria should help the commission select the candidates that can create the most virtuous ensemble work.

Ideally, an MFA should give the students the opportunity to explore as many theatre genres as possible, develop as many acting techniques as possible, master as many skills as possible. Last but not least the students should work on expanding their limits. But personal growth can only exist if the effort is aimed in a specific direction. If the students accepted in the MFA program have very different levels of potentialities and contrasting nature of abilities then it is very hard to achieve a high level of performance as an ensemble. And in an MFA program, particularly in a Romanian one, the ensemble work represents most of the work load. Therefore, I strongly believe that the commission should not only test the individual abilities of the candidates during the admission process but also through work-shops technique observe what are the collective abilities that can thrive among a certain group of candidates and use them as indicators in order to form the best possible ensemble.

Conclusions

After all, what distinguish a drama school from another it is not so much the different acting techniques and methods that it's using, but the vision that it has about the type of actor it wants to produce. Elite acting school doesn't only seek to form professionals. An elite acting school seeks to form characters, knowing that only by nurturing the uniqueness of every - person, the artistic personality can thrive and make a difference in the world.

Both UNATC as USC as representative learning institutions in their country, are fully aware about the importance of the artist's contribution to society.

UNATC states that it's mission is to support "the active citizen participation in society, promoting social inclusion and entrepreneurship for good relations with the labour market" and "assumes the role as national cultural centre that contributes to the formation, development, transmission and dissemination of cultural values, and represents a benchmark for the art and culture of our country, a generator of artistic and cultural events"³⁴.

While USC affirms that it "draw upon the traditions of the past, create in the present, and build towards the vivid future of our disciplines with passion and rigor. Our faith in the value of stories – which inform and define our lives, our cultures and our societies – is unshakeable. The School's mission is to educate and train the artists and creators who will imagine and manifest these stories, in every media, for the enrichment of all"³⁵.

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*miniseries Upstart (**Twitch TV**). Currently Ana can be seen on Bucharest's stages in The Approach directed by Peter Kerek at **Art Theater**, Hasteg directed by Dana Rotaru at **Teatrelli** and was invited to attend the MXT Program, ran by Harvard University, Boston.*